

*'I see now that the deeper work of
sorting out the terror of living in that
family had begun there, with those
trees.'*

PAM BERNARD, referring to a poem she wrote at her
mother's bedside

Painter finds release in poetry

By Judith Montminy
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

DUXBURY - On the night her mother died, artist Pam Bernard started a series of difficult paintings. She wanted to give shape to dark and confused feelings about her family and the silence that had allowed sexual abuse to continue over generations. The paintings were cathartic, but the visual expression could not tell the real story.

Words, instead, clarified Bernard's struggle. Through poetry, she finally tore into years of silence.

"I see now that the deeper work of sorting out the terror of living in that family had begun there, with those trees," said Bernard, 52, referring to a poem she wrote at her mother's bedside. The image of a stand of trees - three or four rogue hairs "sprouting on the hill of her chin" - charted the landscape Bernard needed to explore.

Several of the poems relating directly to her family are included in Bernard's new book, "My Own Hundred Doors," published by Bright Hill Press. Earlier this month she gave readings at Waterstone's and Grolier Books in Cambridge. On Nov. 23 Bernard will sign copies of her new book at Westwinds Bookshop in Duxbury.

Bernard straddles both the visu-

al world of the artist and the verbal world of the poet.

All art is connected, she said.

"What touches the viewer or the reader is that someone cared enough to make something and they had to think about structure of elements . . . and bring together some kind of unity. I think that is what making art is, and what reaches someone else," she said.

In both poetry and art, Bernard has received recognition.

This year she won a prestigious National Endowment of the Arts fellowship in creative writing as well as the Bright Hills Press full-length poetry manuscript competition. Two years ago she won the Grolier Poetry Award and the Daniel Vorougian Award from the New England Poetry Club. Her poems have been published in TriQuarterly published by Northwestern University, Yankee magazine, Atlanta Review and other literary magazines.

Her paintings have been exhibited in the Brush Gallery in Lowell, River Contemporary Art in Great Barrington and the Bromfield Gallery in Boston, among other venues.

Like her work, Bernard splits her time between two distinct bases. At Fort Point Channel in Boston, she paints and helps run The Creative Team, an advertising and communications company owned with

POETRY, Page 14

Painter finds release in poetry

■ POETRY

Continued from Page 12

her husband, artist Harry Bernard. At home in Duxbury, and anywhere else she finds herself, she writes her poetry. Regularly she attends poetry workshops run by Barbara Helfgott Hyett, the Brookline poet Bernard credits for helping her to find and hone her poetic voice, and with it roust out demons from her past.

"An abused child herself, I believe my mother played out that perversity upon her own family, sanctioning, through her silence, the twisted behavior of an older son, my brother, against family members, and most tragically, children," she said. Bernard was the youngest of nine children. Her abusive brother was 20 years older.

"I think at some point in my life, I needed to tell the truth about my family. I needed to say out loud that silence in a family is destructive. [It was] part of my own standing up for myself in the world," she said.

Twelve years ago, though, Bernard had never written a word about those growing up years. She had not read much poetry, either.

Casually, her literary journey began at a cocktail party in Duxbury when she asked her friend Sondra Upham, an English teacher at the local high school, "What's with this poetry stuff? I think I'd like to try it."

"It just came out of the blue," Bernard said of her query.

Upham and a group of teachers from Duxbury High School had been meeting with Hyett once a month after school in Duxbury. When the English department head at the time, James Buechler, told Upham that Bernard could come to a workshop session, the artist quickly wrote a poem to bring with her.

"The language was so mannered," she said of that first attempt at poetry. "I didn't have a clue what I was doing. But I learned pretty quickly. Hyett is just a genius at teaching people poetry. . . . Her genius is to let them speak their voice."

Over the past 12 years, in addition to studying poetry with Hyett, Bernard earned a bachelor's degree in art

FYI

Nov. 23, 3-5 p.m., Pam Bernard will sign her book of poetry, "My Own Hundred Doors," at Westwinds Bookshop, 45 Depot St., Duxbury. Call (617) 934-2128.

"My Own Hundred Doors," published by Bright Hill Press, also is available through the Barnes and Noble store in Braintree, where Bernard will give a reading this winter.

history from Harvard and a master's of fine art from Warren Wilson College's program for writers.

Recently she has been trying to organize a poetry workshop in the south suburbs.

"It's hard to find people down here," she said. "It's tough because so many people are closet poets, but no one in their family knows they've written poetry. Often it's because the poems are about what they really feel."

That genuine feeling is the basis of good art, Bernard said.

"Experience reveals that the receiver of artistic expression is touched most profoundly by the genuine spirit of the creator of that expression," she said. "The artist's struggle is to give that material a voice to be heard above the din of everyday life."

"This has been a remarkable and fortunate year for me - a fellowship in creative writing from the NEA, a first book published," she said. "Now, I am moving forward with a project in which I explore the residual effects of war on both combatants and noncombatants: children put to work for the war effort, young men sacrificed."

Again, Bernard's poems will focus on ways adults fail to keep children safe.

"We don't protect children in this society," she said. "They're always the first to go."



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / PAM BERRY

Pam Bernard, artist and author of "My Own Hundred Doors," works on her poetry at her Duxbury home; behind her hangs her oil painting "Madonna and Child."